

ENERGY PROJECTS REPORT – Town Council Meeting, 14 October 2024

Report from Benhall and Sternfield Parish Meeting, 11 September 2024

The Town Clerk, Councillors John Fisher, Nick Jackson and I attended Benhall and Sternfield's Energy Projects Parish Meeting on 11 September 2024. The large audience comprised local residents and guests: Suffolk County Councillor (SCC), Richard Rout, East Suffolk Councillors: Tom Daly and Katy Graham, Sizewell C representative Richard Knights and Philip Ridley, NSIP lead East Suffolk Council (ESC).

Benhall and Sternfield councillors submitted their verbal reports dealing with the Sealink Additional Statutory Consultation, namely the proposed route and Sunday working hours. Generally the report content reflected Saxmundham's response. Lengthy discussion ensued regarding the battle won over Sizewell C's proposed water extraction from the Sternfield reservoir and Sizewell C's sincere apology.

Benhall and Sternfield, Councillor Charlotte Fox delivered an excellent synopsis of the energy projects threatening our area. As she noted, the task has taken over her life, (something I can personally empathise with). I reiterated that the burden could be eased with Saxmundham and the Villages working together in responding to NSIP consultations, by sharing expertise and reducing duplication. To achieve this, representatives from Benhall and Sternfield and Kelsale Cum Carlton have been invited to join the Energy Projects Working Group (see separate Agenda item).

Councillor Richard Rout and Councillor Katy Graham acknowledged that the energy projects are creating stresses in the community. Councillor Graham advised that ESC were instigating a Communities Support Scheme and Councillor Rout discussed the SCC's proposed Mental Wellbeing Guidance for NSIP developers. (This is available on SCC's website).

NATIONAL GRID

Change of ownership of National Grid Electricity Systems Operator (NG ESO)

On Friday 13 September, National Grid announced that it had agreed to sell its Electricity System Operator to the UK government for £630m including debt. The deal should be completed by 1 October and will be known as the National Energy System (NESO). Will it make any difference? Time will tell but currently the same executives will remain in post.

Bramford to Twinstead Pylons

Despite SCC formal objections to the proposal, 18km of overhead pylons and 11km of underground cable through the Dedham Vale were greenlighted by DESNEZ on 12 September. Admittedly concessions were gained to mitigate the development and perhaps we should take some heart that amendments were made to National Grid's plans.

Offshore Co-ordination Support Scheme

The scheme has been scrapped. Basically, the scheme was an attempt by National Grid to appear to be undertaking innovative projects by combining Sea Link with North Falls and Five Estuaries wind farms. It changes little as the proposal was not a meshed grid framework and solely provided National Grid with a platform to say 'we are doing offshore pooling energy'.

SIZEWELL C CO.

Sizewell C Traffic Monitoring

Sizewell C has engaged with local parish councils and will monitor traffic. The first survey will be undertaken for a week in October 2024 and a further in week in March/April 2025 with a further survey in August 2025 to obtain baseline seasonal traffic flows. The traffic count locations are generally spread along the route of the A12, or on routes from the A12 heading towards Sizewell ranging from Blythburgh in the north to Woodbridge in the south. Of interest to Saxmundham: Monitoring points will pick up the traffic on the B1119 between Saxmundham and Leiston further points will check those vehicles travelling from Leiston via the rat run via Clay Hills into Kelsale.

Report: Sizewell C Co Community Forum, 9 October 2024

The Town Clerk and I attending the Forum held at High Lodge, Darsham. This now bi-annual public event allows Sizewell C to update Town and Parish councillors on project progress. Interestingly, the UK Government is now the principle owner with EDF owning minority shares. The emphasis of the event was on being a good neighbour:

- Education/ training and employment for local young people and adults, albeit 50 per cent of the workforce will be travelling workers.
- Support of local companies including food providers.
- Reiteration of the community support via Suffolk Community Foundation with the next grant funding round closing on 19 January 2025 including a new Environment Improvement fund worth £12 m commencing early 2025.
- The introduction of monthly project and project related update bulletins to town and parish councils.
- Sizewell C Co confirmed that they are working with transmission infrastructure providers in respect to traffic and the potential for project cumulative impacts.

The highlight of the evening was the drone footage of the enormous site. Whilst both disturbing, yet fascinating, it clarified that Sizewell C is most definitely the largest construction project in Europe.

RESPONSE TO THE TOWN'S LETTER TO RH EDWARD MILIBAND, MP – DEPARTMENT FOR ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO (DESNEZ).

The Clerk received a response from a DESNEZ staff member on 15 September 2024. Basically, it is a politician's response, with little hope to prevent the converter stations, except the wording that 'each project in its application must demonstrate it has fairly considered alternatives'. This is a contended area in most objectors' opinions. Baseline, the Secretary of State and DESNEZ will not comment on specific concerns to avoid prejudicing any ultimate planning decision and when taking the decision he will consider a range of factors relevant to any development consent application. On the basis that Sunnica solar farm was rushed through within days of the new parliament, I personally do not hold much hope unless there is a major change in policy.

FINALLY:

A date for the diary: Saturday, 16 November, 10.00-15.00: Saxmundham Town Council's Energy Projects Exhibition at the Market Hall.

Gnb/10 Oct 2024